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***NOAA Fisheries Service Releases Proposed
Conservation Plan for Puget Sound Killer Whales***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) today released a [proposed conservation plan](#) for Southern Resident killer whales – those seen in Puget Sound in the summer – that identifies measures to help restore the population and provides goals to measure success.

Work on the plan began when the Southern Resident killer whales were designated a “depleted stock” in 2003. A preliminary draft of the plan was released for public review this past March. The agency has incorporated comments from that review into today’s proposed plan.

“The contribution by the local community has been crucial to the progress we’ve made in developing a plan to protect these remarkable animals,” said Bob Lohn, head of NOAA Fisheries Service’s northwest region in Seattle.

The three primary threats identified as possible causes of the killer whales’ decline are availability of prey, pollution, and disruptions from vessels. Oil spills and disease have also been identified as possible threats.

The proposed plan identifies conservation efforts already underway, and offers measures to address each of the threats. The plan also lays out an “adaptive management” approach to update conservation actions as new information becomes available.

“It’s vital that we continue to gather and analyze information on our region’s orcas. We’re very appreciative of the Washington Congressional delegation’s efforts to provide money for killer whale research and conservation. It’s that kind of support that will allow us to continue working to improve the health of these animals,” Lohn said.

Lohn added that another effort contributing to restoring these killer whales is the Puget Sound Shared Strategy, a regional coalition aimed at restoring salmon in Puget Sound. A draft recovery plan for Puget Sound Chinook was submitted to the agency this summer. Since salmon are one of the killer whales’ main food sources, increasing salmon numbers and quality are important in improving orca numbers and health.

The population of this killer whale stock, known officially as the Eastern North Pacific Southern Residents, fell from a high of around 97 animals in 1996 to just 79 in 2001. It's now estimated at 91. The Southern Residents range as far south as California and north into British Columbia. They are typically seen in Puget Sound during the summer.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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